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ABSTRACT

Socio-psychological research concerning the relationship between attributions and coping with negative events unrelated to marriage suggests two constructs, blame and perceived control, which may influence conflict resolution in marriage. Married women (N=32) were interviewed in an investigation of attributions of control and blame for marital conflict and satisfaction with marriage. Each respondent was asked to complete a marital satisfaction questionnaire and to discuss two standard conflict situations and two conflicts from her own marriage. Results indicated that blaming one's spouse for marital problems was negatively associated with marital satisfaction and perceived personal control over conflicts was positively associated with marital satisfaction. Using exploratory path analytic techniques, a model of marital satisfaction emerged in which the wife's satisfaction was found to be related to her perception of both husband's and wife's contributions. The husband's role was traced through husband blame to seriousness of the marital conflict, whereas the wife's own role was traced through the wife's control to the problem's resolvability. Thus, the wife perceived her husband as the one who determined how negative their marital problems were, while she perceived herself as the major force behind the more positive aspects of resolving and avoiding conflicts. (Author)

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Blame, Control, and Marital Satisfaction: Wives' Attributions for Conflict in Marriage*

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Blame, Control, and Marital Satisfaction: Wives' Attributions for Conflict in Marriage

Family researchers have debated the relationship between spousal conflict and marital satisfaction. The assumption that conflict and satisfaction in marriage are inversely associated appears to be unfounded (Orden and Bradburn, 1968). Rather, marital conflict is an inevitable, and at least sometimes valuable, component of intimate relationships (Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1976; Scanzoni, 1979). Interpersonal relationships require a continual process of negotiation and exchange which permits partners to maximize their individual outcomes and maintain an equilibrium that satisfies both spouses (Blau, 1964; Thibaut and Kelley, 1959; Scanzoni, 1979). Despite long-term benefits of the negotiation process, however, conflict resolution itself may be unpleasant and create temporary unhappiness or dissatisfaction with the marriage. Family therapists often note that spouses seeking therapy have extreme difficulty resolving conflicts quickly or peacefully (e.g., Haley, 1976; Raush, Barry, Hertell, and Swain, 1974; Satir, 1967). Of interest to researchers, then, is not whether conflicts influence marital satisfaction, but how conflicts are resolved with a minimum of negative feelings and marital dissatisfaction.

Participants' interpretation of the conflict situation provides one means of investigating conflict resolution and marital satisfaction. In recent years, social psychologists have become increasingly interested in people's causal explanations and interpretations of events. This perspective, known as attribution theory, has involved a shift in emphasis

from studying overt behaviors to studying meanings and perceptions of phenomena. Attribution theory has become popular, but it has rarely been used to study ongoing interpersonal situations (Orvis, Kelley, and Butler, 1976; Harvey, Wells, and Alvarez, 1978). The present study is an attempt to investigate attributions influencing spouses' resolution of conflict and marital satisfaction. Social psychological research concerning the relationship between attributions and coping with negative events unrelated to marriage suggests two constructs--blame and perceived control--which may influence conflict resolution in marriage.

Attributions of Blame and Control

In the present study the researchers hypothesized that blaming one's spouse and believing one does not have control over conflicts (i.e., cannot alter outcomes through one's own efforts) would be associated with low marital satisfaction. These hypotheses derive from past social psychological research which has suggested that blaming another for one's misfortune is associated with poor coping, as is low perceived control over negative events. Psychological researchers have frequently noted the positive contribution of perceived control to individual adaptation (e.g., DeCharms, 1968; Rotter, 1966; Seligman, 1975; Wortman and Brehm, 1975). People cope better with negative events when they believe that they have some control over the resolution of the problem situation; this has been supported both in field studies of victimized populations (see, e.g., Langer and Rodin, 1976; Schulz, 1976) and in laboratory experiments, in which aversive stimulation has served as the negative event (see, e.g., Bowers, 1968; Glass and Singer, 1972). It seems plausible to expect that a spouse's perceived control over conflict resolution will positively

influence his/her satisfaction with the marriage.

Relevant to the blame hypothesis is Bulman and Wortman's (1977) finding that paralyzed accident victims were most likely to cope poorly when they blamed another (as opposed to themselves, their environment, or chance) for their victimization. Newman and Langer (in press), in their study of divorced women, similarly reported that the least well adjusted women, in terms of activity level, social skills, and happiness, were those who blamed their husbands (i.e., made dispositional attributions to their husbands). Clinical observations seem to support the perspective that blaming one's spouse is dysfunctional. Sanctuary (1968) reported that clients in a counseling setting usually blame their partners, and the elimination of spouse blame is often an integral part of therapy (Nunnally, Miller, and Wackman, 1975). Therapists comment that spouses who habitually blame one another are difficult to help (Glick and Kessler, 1974; also see Lederer and Jackson, 1968).

While blaming one's spouse for conflicts may be associated with decreased marital satisfaction, self-blame may be related to increased satisfaction. If people blame themselves for negative events, they are apt to believe that they can control similar situations in the future. According to Janoff-Bulman (1979), however, this "adaptive" self-blame is manifested only when an individual blames changeable factors, such as one's own behavior (i.e., engages in behavioral blame), as opposed to relatively unalterable factors, such as one's character (i.e., engages in characterological blame). The former is associated with increased beliefs in control, whereas the latter is associated with decreased esteem. If spouses blame aspects of themselves they regard as changeable (e.g., behaviors), such self-blame is apt to be associated with increased

marital satisfaction. If the factors blamed for marital conflicts are believed to be relatively permanent in nature, such blame will be associated with decreased marital satisfaction; it is proposed that in blaming another, this type of blame underlies one's attributions.

In addition to investigating whether blame and control attributions are associated with marital satisfaction, the present researchers were interested in exploring the structure of this relationship. Recent research by Brickman and his colleagues (Note 1) on attributions and helping behavior suggests that a distinction should be drawn between attributions for the past and attributions for the future, or, similarly, between attributions for outcomes (e.g., marital conflicts) and attributuions for solutions (e.g., conflict resolution). Perhaps spouses differentially perceive their role in the marital relationship, such that one party is regarded as responsible for problems, whereas the other is regarded as responsible for solutions. Using an exploratory path analytic technique, the present research sought to explore not only the positive or negative relationships between attributional constructs and marital satisfaction, but also the organization of such perceptions as they relate to marital satisfaction.

Methodological Concerns

In conducting research regarding attributions for marital conflict, one has a choice of asking respondents to generate conflicts from their own marriage experiences or of presenting standard situations describing "typical" conflicts. If a study were based solely on responses to questions about conflicts generated by respondents, it could readily be argued that the respondents' attributions were idiosyncratic, reflecting

their reactions to the individual conflicts they chose to discuss. Since the conflicts would differ markedly from one another, it would be premature to conclude that the attributions (to these different situations) reflect general tendencies which might be related to marital satisfaction across the respondents. Differences in attributions could be a product of the different types of situations that happily and unhappily married spouses choose to discuss. To control for systematic differences in the types of situations respondents choose, researchers generally provide standard scenarios so that all react to the same situations. Using this technique, experimenters are able to draw valid inferences from their data but they are not informed about respondents' attributions for actual problems. In the present study both standard conflicts and conflicts generated by respondents from their own experiences were used to obtain attributional data. In this way information about actual conflicts within marriage (conflicts which would be meaningful to the respondents) was solicited, and attributional data obtained from standardized scenarios were used to insure that valid inferences were drawn. In particular, the results from the standard scenarios were used as a "check" on the marital conflicts generated by the respondents.

Wives were selected as respondents in the present study. Since the purpose of the research was to begin to explore individuals' attributions and their relationship to marital satisfaction, the perceptions of one partner of the married couple appeared to be a good starting point. There are important ethical questions which arise when interviewing both members of a couple about attributions for conflicts in their marriage. Following the research, spouses would no doubt compare per-

ceptions of marital conflict; such discussions could conceivably open old "wounds" and foster continued conflict. It was thus decided that one spouse would be interviewed; wives rather than husbands were selected as respondents because it was believed that they would be more willing to speak openly about conflict to the female interviewer. The present study, then, involved intensive interviews with married woman. Attributions of blame and perceptions of control were first solicited in response to two standard scenarios. The same questions were then posed about two marital conflicts generated by the respondents.

Method

Respondents

Respondents were 32 married women between the ages of 25 and 35 years, who were randomly selected from the most recent Amherst street list, a document which provides names, ages, occupations and residences of townspeople. The women's participation was invited through follow-up phone calls in which they were asked if they were willing to participate. Of the 86 women to whom letters were mailed, 38 could not be reached by telephone (e.g., they had moved), and thus the group that was reached represented a more stable, less transient part of the population in the college town involved in the study. Of the remaining 48 women contacted, 16 refused to participate. The final sample of 32 respondents represented 67% of the women contacted by telephone and 37% of the total initial sample. The interviewer generally met the respondents at their homes, although eight (25%) women preferred to meet at the university. Each woman was paid $5.00 per hour for her partici-

pation, and the average interview length was one and a half hours.

The mean age of the women interviewed was 30.34 years, while that of their husbands was 32.78 years. They had been married from one month to 15 years, with a mean and median marriage length of eight years. It was the first marriage for both spouses in 30 (94%) of the couples. Five (16%) of the couples had no children, and the remaining 27 couples had from one to three children. In general, the families represented by the population interviewed were of relatively high socioeconomic status, as suggested by their income, education and occupation. Only five (16%) of the respondents' families had an annual income of less than $10,000; 16 (50%) had incomes between $10,000 and $20,000, and 11 (34%) had incomes larger than $20,000. Twelve women (37%) listed housewife as their primary occupation, while the others listed a variety of occupations ranging from professor (four respondents) to grade school or high school teacher (five respondents) to receptionist (two respondents). The husbands were most frequently professors (nine men) or managers of a retail store or restaurant (ten men). Educationally, the wives were distributed equally among three categories: some college or technical school, college graduate, and graduate degree. Twenty-seven (84%) of the husbands were college graduates, of whom 18 had graduate degrees. Ten (31%) women listed their own religious background as Catholic, fourteen (44%) as Protestant, and seven (22%) as Jewish. All but three women reported that both they and their husbands were in good or excellent health.

Procedure

At the beginning of each session, the interviewer described herself, including a few details about her academic career and her own

marriage, in order to set the stage for the discussion of personal issues and to encourage self-disclosure. The general nature of the study was then explained and a consent form was signed by the respondent. Following this, the women were asked to complete a form requesting general background information (income, education, occupation, length of marriage, number of children, quality of health, religion) as well as a marital staisfaction questionnaire (see below).

Following the completion of these forms, the interviewer read the respondent two standard husband-wife conflict situations of moderate seriousness:

1. "You and your husband are at a large party where you both know a lot of people. After you have been conversing with a friend for a while by yourself, you notice your husband across the room deep in conversation with an attractive woman you have never seen before. Feeling worried and jealous, you observe them for a few minutes and then cross the room and stand conspicuously close to your husband. He continues to talk for a few minutes and then says, "Oh, (respondent's name), I didn't notice you there. Sheila, this is my wife." The woman says, "Oh, I didn't know you were married," and excuses herself shortly thereafter. You feel unhappy during the rest of the party and, as you drive home, have a large fight with your husband about why he was so attentive to the other woman and failed to notice you standing uncomfortably next to him for so long."

2. "You and your husband have never had a lot of extra spending money and you have wanted some new living room furniture for a long time. Your husband has spent your extra money on his hobby

of electronics in the past, but he finally promises you that you can spend your income tax refund this year on a new couch. However, just before you receive the refund, a large wind and rain storm blows out the window of your husband's basement workroom, drenching and ruining several rather expensive tools. Therefore, your husband says he must replace them with the income tax refund. You are disappointed that you won't be able to get the new couch and tell your husband that it's your turn to get what you want and his turn to wait. He replies that he only meant that you could have what you wanted as long as he had already purchased what he needed. You then have a large fight about the spending of the money."

The order of presentation of these scenarios was alternated from respondent to respondent. Following the presentation of each scenario, the participant was asked to respond to a series of written questions regarding her perception of the conflict. Respondents were asked to divide 100% of the blame for the conflict among the following four targets: self, husband, another person or other people, and the impersonal world. On 5-point scales, the women were then asked to indicate how serious they believed the problem to be, whether they thought the conflict could be avoided in the future, how much control they felt they had over whether the problem would recur, how much control they felt their husband had over whether the problem would recur, how permanent they perceived the blamed characteristic to be, and the extent to which they felt it would be possible to resolve this conflict in the future. As the respondent answered each written question, she was asked to explain to the interviewer why she responded as she did. Respondents were also asked several open-ended questions:

why they assigned blame as they did; who, in practice and ideally, was/should have been responsible for the resolution of the conflict; and whether they have tried to resolve this conflict situation in the past.

Following their analysis and discussion of the two standard scenarios, participants were then asked to generate two situations which had caused moderate conflict between themselves and their husbands. The standard scenarios were presented first to preclude the carry-over of a response set from the respondents' conflict. It was assumed that the danger of carry-over from standard scenarios to respondents' conflicts would be minimal, given the likelihood that attributions were already made for the actual conflicts prior to the interview session. For ethical reasons the women were not encouraged to discuss problems which represented serious difficulties in their marriages, but respondents most often chose to discuss rather serious and personal matters. Following the women's description of each conflict situation, the interviewers asked the same questions (in the same format) as those which followed the standard scenarios. Finally, the interviewer attempted to clarify any questions raised, explained the study in greater detail, and paid the respondent for her participation. A brief summary of the results of the study was later mailed to all respondents.

Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire

Theoretical and methodological issues pertaining to the measurement of marital satisfaction (Gurin, Veroff, and Field, 1960; Locke, 1968; Mowrer and Mowrer, 1978; Renne, 1970; Saxton, 1972) were considered in the development of a questionnaire. The final marital

satisfaction questionnaire was comprised of three parts. Part 1 was composed of twelve questions, derived primarily from the work of Locke (1968), but modified to suit this decade and population. The questions focused on general issues such as overall happiness with the marriage, perception of husband's happiness with the marriage, and frequency with which the husband does things which annoy the wife. Part 2 provided a list of twelve areas (e.g., division of income, amount of time spent socializing with others, division of household chores, contraceptive methods) and the respondent was asked to indicate the extent to which she and her husband agree on the way they handle each issue. Part 3 entailed another series of twelve, items (e.g., demonstration of affect or expression of love, friends, family finances, aims and goals) and the respondent was asked to indicate the extent to which she is satisfied with their handling of each. The scores within each of the three parts of the questionnaire were adjusted so that each part was weighted equally. The respondent's marital satisfaction score was the sum of responses over items in all three parts.

The reliability of the marital satisfaction measure was derived by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient. For all 36 items in the questionnaire as a whole $\alpha = .95$. In order to get a crude measure of the validity of the satisfaction measure, the interviewer independently coded her perceptions of the respondents' marital satisfaction in one of three categories (less happy than average, average, happier than average) immediately following each interview. These ratings correlated positively with respondents' marital satisfaction scores

($r = .64$, $p < .001$).

Results

The two conflict situations provided by the interviewer will be referred to as "standard scenarios," and the two provided by the respondents themselves will be referred to as "respondents' conflicts." In the interests of reliablilty, the responses to the standard scenarios were averaged for each subject, as were the responses to the parallel questions for the respondents' conflicts. In general, statistical analyses relating attributions to marital satisfaction were conducted separately for the responses to the standard scenarios and the responses to the respondents' conflicts. Across respondents, satisfaction scores ranged from 91 to 147, (possible range = 30 to 150) with a mean of 119.62 and a standard deviation of 16.14 None of the background variables was significantly related to marital satisfaction.

Blame Attributions Across all Situations

The party most frequently blamed by the respondents for marital conflict was the husband; the mean percentage of blame to husbands was approximately 43% for both the respondents' conflicts and the standard scenarios. The mean percentage of blame that respondents assigned to themselves across all four conflicts was approximately 30%. Of the 32 respondents, 15 assigned the majority of blame to their husbands and seven assigned the majority of blame to themselves across the four situations. Following a median split on marital satisfaction scores, a chi-square test was conducted on these 22 respondents. Results indicated a significant difference between the high and low satisfaction groups; five of the seven who predominantly blamed the wife fell into

the high satisfaction group, whereas ten of the fifteen who predominantly blamed the husband fell into the low satisfaction group ($X^2 = 6.80$, $p<.01$).

In addition, when a difference score was computed by subtracting total husband blame from wife blame, analyses indicated that those who blamed their husbands less than themselves were significantly more satisfied (126.40 vs 113.65, t (29) = 2.46, $p<.05$) than those who blamed their husbands more than themselves. When an analysis was also conducted on the difference scores obtained by subtracting husband control from wife control, results suggested that wives who felt they had less control than their husbands were also less satisfied with their marriages (124.78 vs. 113.00, t (25) = 2.11, $p<.05$).

Insert Table 1 about here

Respondents' Conflicts

As can be seen in Table 1, the five marital conflicts most frequently mentioned by respondents were the spending of money, relations with relatives, discipline of children, division of housework and childcare, and communication difficulties. The respondents' attributional analyses of their own conflicts were related to their marital satisfaction, for husband blame for the conflicts was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction scores ($r = -.35$, $p<.05$). Low marital satisfaction was also directly associated with greater seriousness of reported conflicts ($r = -.46$, $p<.01$) and a decreased likelihood of their reported resolvability ($r = .35$, $p<.05$).

In order to explore the relationship among the participants' quantitative responses, a series of stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted. A formal path analysis was not conducted

due to the exploratory nature of the study; instead a post hoc path model was developed using multiple regression techniques. A multiple regression was first conducted using marital satisfaction as the dependent measure and entering all other quantitative variables (i.e., wife blame, husband blame, blame of impersonal world, blame of others, seriousness of the conflict, resolvability of the conflict, permanence of the factor blamed, avoidability of the conflict , wife control over recurrence, husband control over recurrence) as possible predictors. The predictors of marital satisfaction were identified as those factors whose individual contribution (F to enter or remove) was significant at .05 or less (e.g., for marital satisfaction, seriousness and resolvability were significant predictors). A multiple regression was then conducted for each of these significant predictors (e.g., seriousness and resolvability), entering the remaining non-significant variables into the analyses. Again the same criteria were used to identify the best predictors. Each significant predictor, then, became a criterion variable to be predicted by the remaining (thus far nonsignificant) factors. The procedure was continued until significant predictors were no longer produced by the analyses. The result of this chain of regressions is shown in Figure 1. It must be emphasized that the model, while presented in the framework of a path analysis, is by no means

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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causal, but rather reflects correlated constructs.

Marital satisfaction was best predicted by seriousness of the conflict ($r = -.46$, $B = 7.12$, $p < .01$) and by resolvability of the conflict

($r = .35$, $B = 5.75$, $p < .06$). Two distinct "paths" emerged from these two variables. Only one variable--husband blame--significantly predicted seriousness of the conflict ($r = .46$, $B = .18$, $p < .01$), and husband blame was in turn predicted by husband control over the occurrence of the conflict ($r = .43$, $B = 10.61$, $p < .05$) and the permanence of the blamed characteristic ($r = .28$, $B = 7.84$, $p < .01$). Resolvability, representing the first link of another path, was best predicted by avoidability of the conflict ($r = .47$, $B = .43$, $p < .01$), which was itself predicted by wife control over the recurrence of the conflict ($r = .47$, $B = .38$, $p < .01$).

Standard Scenarios

As evident in Table 2, there were significant differences between responses to questions referring to the respondents' conflicts and responses to the same questions referring to the standard scenarios.

Insert Table 2 about here

Respondents' conflicts were regarded as more serious, less resolvable and less avoidable. Further, other people were blamed more for conflicts generated by respondents than for the standard conflicts. However, there were no differences in amount of blame attributed to one's husband or oneself (i.e., wife) in the respondents' conflicts and standard scenarios. While the husband was perceived as having less control in the respondents' conflicts, there were no differences reported in the wife's perceived control over the conflict.

Paralleling findings for the respondents' conflicts, seriousness of the problems presented in the standard scenarios was negatively

correlated with marital satisfaction ($r = -.39$. $p < .05$), and resolvability and avoidability of the conflicts were positively correlated with marital satisfaction ($r = .67$, $p < .01$; $r = .52$, $p < .01$), respectively). Further, the more permanent the blamed characteristic, the lower the marital satisfaction score ($r = -.44$ $p < .05$); and the greater the control the respondent felt she had over the recurrence of the conflict, the higher her satisfaction with her marriage ($r = .38$, $p < .05$).

In order to provide a test of the model obtained from responses to the respondents' conflicts, this model was treated as a "formal" analysis. This involved entering those responses to the standard scenarios which paralleled the responses to the respondent's conflicts that were significant in the prior analyses. Thus, resolvability and seriousness of the standard scenarios were entered as possible predictors of marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was again significantly predicted by resolvability ($r = .67$, $B = 9.77$, $p < .001$) and seriousness ($r = -.39$, $B = 1.68$, $p < .001$), but the order was reversed such that seriousness was the foremost predictor for the standard scenarios. Seriousness of the conflict was once again significantly predicted by husband blame ($r = .36$, $B = -.14$, $p < .05$), although husband control and permanance of the blamed characteristic did not emerge as significant predictors of husband blame.[1] In the second path of the model, resolvability was again predicted by avoidability of the conflict ($r = .50$, $B = .45$, $p < .01$), and avoidability was predicted by the wife's control over the recurrence of the problem ($r = -.62$, $B = .73$, $p < .001$). The basic pattern of the two-path model which emerged from respondents' conflicts was supported.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Discussion

In general the research findings provided support for the hypotheses that marital satisfaction is negatively associated with husband blame and positively associated with wives' perceived control. According to these findings, the most satisfied wives are those who do not blame their husbands for marital conflicts and who feel they have control over the resolution of conflicts which arise. Across four conflict situations in the present study, husbands were blamed more than any other single factor (approximately 43%), although the wives did attribute close to one-third of all blame to themselves. While self-blame was not directly correlated with marital satisfaction, the majority of women who attributed most of the blame to themselves were among the more satisfied group of respondents,[2] whereas the majority of women who attributed most of the blame to their husbands were among the least satisfied group of respondents. Further, the relative degree of husband versus self blame may provide an important clue to marital satisfaction. Women who blamed their husbands less than themselves, regardless of the extent of absolute blame attributed to each, were more satisfied with their marriages than were those who blamed their husbands more than themselves.

The path model (see figures 1 and 2) which emerged in this study not only provided support for the importance of blame and control attributions, but further suggested the way in which these perceptions may be organized in their association with marital satisfaction. Husband blame was linked to satisfaction through seriousness of the problem, and wife control was linked to satisfaction through resolvability of the problem. In other words, it appears that the wife

perceives her husband as the one who determines how negative problems are in the marriage, and she perceives herself as the major force behind more "positive" aspects of the relationship, resolving or entirely avoiding conflicts. The two paths correspond to the distinction drawn by Brickman and his colleagues (Note 1) between attributions of responsibility for outcomes and for solutions. The path traced through the husband appears to involve attributions for the conflicts themselves (i.e., for outcomes), whereas the path traced through the wife appears to involve attributionns for conflict resolutions (i.e., for solutions).

Husband Blame

In the path model for respondents' conflicts, the wife's blame of the husband was predicted by her perception of his control over the problem as well as by the perceived permanence of the specific factor blamed for the conflict. If the husband was primarily blamed, the respondent was asked to explain why, and she was then asked to indicate the permanence of the explanatory factor she identified. A few examples of reported permanence provide a clearer conception of the husband blame engaged in by respondents.

A serious problem in one wife's marriage was that her husband "keeps things from me (her) when they are bothering him." She feels spouses are supposed to communicate when something is bothering one of them and blames him for not doing so. In addition, she feels his lack of communication is permanent because, as she put it, "It's part of his personality." In a second case the respondent related, "I was not given any say in the decision to move here. His instructorship doesn't pay well and it's temporary. He had another position offered

which would have been more satisfactory to me. It was near my family and paid better." This woman blames her husband, stating that he is impractical and is a poor judge of people (e.g., he misread his colleagues' statements about his chances for tenure), and she went on to say that these are a "permanent part of his character." A third respondent discussed the discipline of their children as a major conflict. She generally feels her husband is too hard on the children; she stated that he "generally lacks patience," a state of affairs which she regards as "pretty permanent." These wives' ascription of permanence to the factor accounting for husband blame (i.e., lack of communication, impracticality and poor judgement, impatience) suggests that the wives regard these factors as more or less unchangeable aspects of their husbands' nature; they blame their husband characterologically (Janoff-Bulman, 1979) in that the problem is perceived as located in his personality. Ten out of fifteen women who blamed their husbands most across all conflicts were among the least satisfied half of the sample. Of these ten women, nine specifically mentioned negative personality characterisitics of their husband as a source of their own marital conflicts. In blaming their husbands, these women are regarding their marital conflicts as due to relatively stable shortcomings within their spouses, a serious state of affairs for marriage.

While permanence of the specific factor blamed was found to predict husband blame, the latter was also predicted by wives' perceptions of husband control. Those who blamed their husbands felt they had a high degree of control over the marital conflict. These women seemed to be saying that their spouses had control over the occurrence and recurrence of the conflict, for they were basically the cause of the

problem; the conflict arose and will arise again because of a shortcoming within the husband. However, although the husbands could control whether the problem will recur, the wives' characterological blame suggests that the husbands will actually not do anything to avoid or resolve the problem--after all, the conflict is due to relatively stable characteristics of the husband. Thus, while the busbands are perceived to have control in that a change on their part could affect the conflict resolution, the wives appear to perceive this change on the husbands' part as unlikely; that which led to the conflict is relatively permanent.

Wife Control

Resolvability of marital problems appears to depend on the wife's perception of her own control over conflicts, as evidenced by the second path of the mode; that is, resolvability, one of the two primary predictors of satisfaction, was traced through avoidability to wife control. The more control the wife believed she had over the conflict, the greater she perceived the likelihood of avoiding the conflict in the future and of resolving the conflict if it arose. This finding is consistent with social psychological literature on the benefits of perceived control, for women who believed they could affect marital outcomes were more satisfied with their marriages than women who believed they had little control For the women in this sample, perceived control over the conflict seemed to imply, "I can avoid or resolve a conflict by exerting control through X, Y, Z behaviors, even if I don't feel the conflict was my fault in the first place." The study's findings indicate that when the woman feels that she cannot exert some control over the problem situation, the problem is regarded as relatively unresol-

vable, and the marriage as relatively unsatisfying.

The way in which wife control is associated with satisfaction is illustrated in the example of one respondent who related that she and her husband were having difficulty conceiving a child. Since she had a child by a former marriage she believes her husband probably has a physical problem but he has been unwilling to see a doctor. The problem has recently manifested itself in sexual problems within their marriage, for he has become impotent. While she feels the physical problems may be permanent, she believes that she has some control over how the problem affects the marriage and therefore perceives the problem as resolvable. In particular, she states that in the future she "can insist that he go to the doctor; this will involve a battle between us before he goes, but I am sure that he will go eventually." Thus although she sees the "cause" of the problems as resting with her husband, the respondent believes that she can have an impact on the outcome of the conflict. Even if the medical examination reveals her husband's permanent sterility, she feels that conclusive information would reduce conflict with her husband.

Several women discussed how they had learned to avoid conflicts by taking greater personal control over problems causing conflict after they had been married for awhile; thus feelings of control may develop over time within marriage. A woman whose tension caused insomnia and subsequent fights with her husband about his making noise after she went to bed, said that she was learning to relax and thus reduce her anxious sleeplessness. Another respondent was learning to be assertive about her mother-in-law's unreasonable demands on her, gaining control over their troubled relationship and associated

marital conflict. A third described how she had learned, following serious bouts with debt, to monitor her spending habits better. These women, among several others in the sample, had learned to exercise control by altering their behavior, and in turn they were able to resolve present conflicts and avoid the recurrence of these problems within their marriage. Feeling control over conflict avoidance and resolution is related to marital satisfaction; inability to resolve and avoid disagreements must lead to many of the pathologies of relationships. Nagging, bickering, yelling, and violence are all products of difficulties in conflict resolution and are representative of interchanges that can make marriage a hellish trap rather than a supportive companionship.

A Final Note

The present study was an exploratory attempt to investigate the relationship between attributions of blame and control and marital satisfaction. The two-path model which emerged is a first step toward sorting through the pattern of associations among factors related to marital satisfaction. All findings are correlational, however, and the path model should not cloud the fact that direction of causation is unknown at this time. Further, the sample included only well educated, high income women. Even if the results are replicated with other samples of women, findings cannot be presumed to apply to men as well; future research on husbands' attributions and marital satisfaction will provide an important test of the study's generalizability. There is some evidence that men and women differ in their reports of marital satisfaction (Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976; Renne, 1970; Gurin et. al., 1960). Further, according to the findings of Gurin et al. (1960), men attribute greater relative

blame to themselves than women for marital situations in which they feel inadequate. The work of Orvis, Kelley, and Butler (1976) and Harvey, Wells, and Alvarez (1978) also alert the researcher interested in attributions within relationships to attend to possible sex differences. The present study is a first step in the investigation of attributions and satisfaction within the context of long-term relationships.

Table 1

Frequencies of Types of Marital Conflicts Generated by Respondents[a]

Conflict Type	Frequency
Spending money (type of purchase, amount to spend; especially concerning major purchases)	9
Relations with relatives	9
Children (rules, discipline, tempers with)	7
Division of housework and childcare	6
Communication, honesty (especially concerning negative feelings)	6
Location of residence, whether to move	4
Own or spouse's nonsexual attachment to another person	4
Husband's occupational choice, husband's income	4
Choice of recreation or vacation	3
Having children (whether to, difficulties doing so)	3
Socializing (amount and type)	2
Amount of time together	2
Physical illness creating tension	2
Power, control over family decisions in general	2
Methods of doing chores	1
	64

[a]Each respondent presented two conflicts

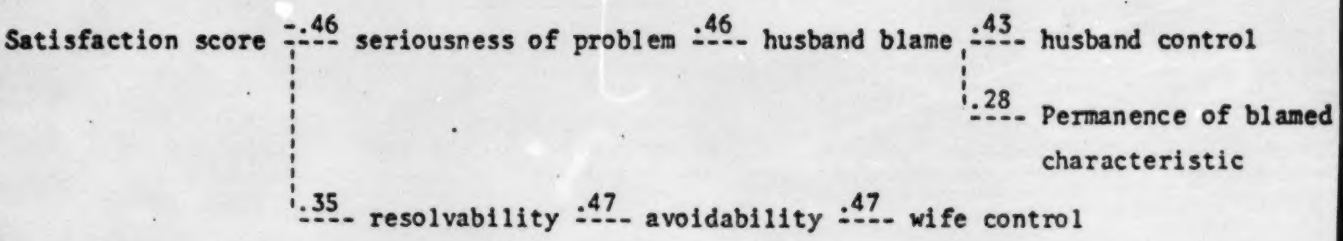

Figure 1. Model of Variables Derived from Multiple Regression Analyses of Respondents Conflicts.

Table 2

Comparison of Responses to Respondents' Conflicts and Standard Scenarios

Variable	Mean Responses Standard Scenarios	Mean Response Respondents'
Seriousness of the problem	2.56	3.31*
Blame to self (i.e., wife)	27.20	31.23
Blame to husband	43.31	42.72
Blame to another person	5.61	11.69*
Blame to impersonal world	22.30	12.59
Permanence of blamed characteristic	2.30	3.08*
Avoidability	3.20	2.52*
Wife's perceived control	3.22	2.86
Control that husband is seen as having	3.56	3.08*
Resolvability	3.80	3.39*

* $p < .05$

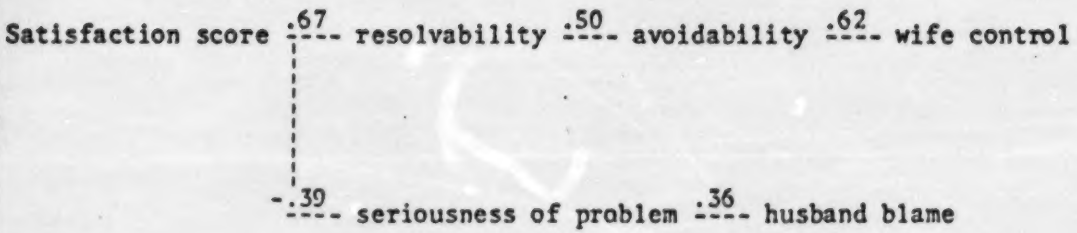

Figure 2. Model of Variables Derived from Multiple Regression Analyses of Standard Scenarios.

Footnotes

1. The models were the same except for predictors of husband blame; no significant predictors of husband blame emerged in the analysis using data from the standard scenarios. Since the standard scenarios did not generally represent actual incidents which occurred in the respondents' marriages, the attributions of blame were conceivably not as well thought through as were the attributions for the self-generated conflicts. The hypothetical husbands in the scenarios were presumably less likely to elicit clear perceptions of husband control and permanence since the women were reacting to a single situation and didn't have access to the husband's behavior across time.

2. It is interesting to note that self-blame by women in this study was virtually all behavioral (see Janoff-Bulman, 1979).

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